

Seeing, Thinking, Acting Different: Wittgenstein's *Language Games* and Bateson's *News of Difference* in Therapeutic Narratives

Michela Galzigna, Padova

"To see keeping a conversation going as a sufficient aim in philosophy, to see wisdom as consisting in the ability to sustain a conversation, is to see human beings as generators of new descriptions rather than beings one hopes to be able to describe accurately".

R.Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*

1. Introduction

Ever since R.Rorty published *The Linguistic Turn* in 1967, the study of narrative has acquired new consideration. For postmodern philosopher J-F. Lyotard the very advances of science are seen "as anything more than a narrative and not one that can override all others" (Lyotard, 1984, 16).

In the last two decades the attention of scholars has focused upon the ability of narrative of modelling our concepts of *legitimacy* and *reality* (Bruner, 2002, 124). The dimension of narrative and that of narrating about oneself is not only what constitutes our peculiar way of being humans, but the privilege means by which we make order in our lives and experiences and this also emphasizes the therapeutic side of narration.

Many philosophers have considered the dimension of multiple perspectives, but some have also underlined a kind of philosophical practical narrative through a relatively new professional figure, that of the *Philosophische Bereiter* set zur *Mitte der philosophischen Praxis*, which Aschenbach sees as "a free dialogue, that does not prescribe any philosopheme, does not give any philosophical knowledge whatsoever; instead it sets thinking in movement in the sense of 'philosophizing' together with someone" (Marquard, 1989, pp.1307).

Aim of this paper is to reflect on what can be called the intermediate territory between psychology and philosophy. The former, before being considered as a discipline, is seen primarily as the *logos* for the *psyché*, which is at the same time a *thérapeia* for the *psyché*, or, in other words, how to *take care of one's soul by means of words* (Hillman, 1984, 46).

It is a reflection in the field of philosophy where this is seen strictly linked to human existence assuming that "living a human life is a philosophical endeavour. Every thought we have, every decision we make, and every act we perform is based upon philosophical assumptions" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, 9).

In this sense a *therapeutic relationship* is one which *does not* necessarily or exclusively occur between a "therapist" and his/her "client"; it is dialogical, in the sense of being a narrative capable of transforming reality, of creating new situations. It is a human relationship made up of concrete interactions between people that take part in it, with an open emphatic disposition, and where, as Wittgenstein says, *words are actions* (Wittgenstein 1953, 546; 1977, 90) bound to produce changes.

In this sense *thérapeia* is a being together in a place, in a relationship, giving to others and to oneself time to speak, reflect, understand, ask and tell, time to make sense out of experiences; open to others, willing to listen

to them with empathy and where, as with the ancient Greeks, words may function as a *Pharmakon*.

Here it will be sought to explore new narrative-philosophical metaphors on the basis of Peirce's statement that: "We *believe* to a proposition on which basis we are willing to act" (Peirce, 1992, 112).

This is very similar to what Gorgias says in his *Encomium of Helen* (12): "A speech that has persuaded a mind, makes the mind that has persuaded to believe in the words and to consent in deeds".

2. Searching for mythologies

The ancient Greek believed every person's identity could be expressed by the events, i.e. *the story* or *stories*, the person had taken part in during the course of the life. When Ulysses at the court of the king of the Pheaces sits in disguise and listens to the blind bard who sings a story about "Deeds of Heroes, a story whose fame goes up to the sky" (Odyssey, VIII, vv. 72-74), for the first time he listens to someone telling about the War of Troy, about himself and his actions, and, as Homer says, in that precise time Ulysses cries. Hannah Arendt says at this regard: "Never before had he cried when the events he now listens to had really happened. Only listening to the tale he gets the full gist of them" (Arendt, 1987, 221).

Always for the ancient Greeks as the gods themselves did take part in these human stories, they were equal to *myths*, and a person's biography became his/her *mythology* (Hillman, 1984, p. 106).

Later the same Greeks identified the concept of *introspection* or *self-knowledge* with the activity of putting in order or reviewing carefully these *stories* (Hillman, 1984, p. 107).

Myths have accompanied the history of mankind from its dawn, "Myth" is a tale, novel, a speech, whose "function is to express in a discursive way an ontological simultaneousness, it simulates a genesis" (Birrel, 1993, 34).

Mythology is a "modality of *signification*", but also an "system of communication, a form and a meaning", a "kind of discourse" (Barthes, 1972, 114, 127).

The concept of *myth* and that of *mythology* in hinted to in some works of Wittgenstein in two fields strictly related with the present paper: with reference to Freudian psychoanalysis and to his own philosophical activity.

In his *Lectures* Wittgenstein refers to Freud's psychoanalysis as "a powerful mythology" and moreover, as a "way of behaving" and "a way of thinking" (Wittgenstein, 1966, 52). He says in fact: "The general result of analysis is that it provides explanations which many people are inclined to accept ... it make easier for them follow certain routes: certain ways of behaving and of thinking becomes natural. They have abandoned a way of thinking and have adopted a new one" (Wittgenstein, 1966, 43). Wittgenstein was keen on reading Freud's works because he believed Freud was "a psychologist who had something to say"

(Monk, 1990, 357) and who "Having read the ancient myth of Oedipus", had not given a scientific explanation of the same, "but simply had proposed a new myth" (Wittgenstein, 1966, 51), a new language or a new narrative.

Wittgenstein considered himself "a disciple of Freud" (Monk, 1990, 357) but opposed Freud's claim that his method was *scientific*. "Freud is constantly claiming to be scientific, but what he gives is only a *speculation*, something prior even to the formation of an hypothesis" (Wittgenstein, 1966, 44).

For how could Freud be scientific if the same discipline he was engaged into was not a scientific one? "Psychology is often called the science of mental phenomena ... this is a bit suspect as if we said: it stands to physics as the science of physical phenomena ... By the science of mental phenomena we mean ... the science which deals with thinking, judging, wishing, wondering. When psychologists draw their correlations they do so by observing individuals ... So, where is the science of mental phenomena?" (Monk, 1990, 496).

But when Freud's method was considered as a *myth* it has the peculiar "attraction which mythological explanation have, ... which say this is all a repetition of something which has happened before" (Wittgenstein, 1966, 43), and through this mythological explanation many people get benefits and advantages because "certain things seem much clearer and easier for them" (Wittgenstein, 1966, 43).

In one of his *Bemerkungen* W. adds that "in a way having oneself psychoanalyzed is like eating from the tree of knowledge. Knowledge acquired set us new ethical problems but contributes nothing to their solution" (Wittgenstein, 1977, 71). Probably psychoanalysis does not help to solve problems, but in the same way as his own philosophical method it may help to "propose or invent new ways to look" (Monk, 1990, 496) at the problems.

In his *Lectures* he writes: "If you are led by psychoanalysis to say that you really thought so and so, or really your motive was so and so, this is not a matter of discovery, but of *persuasion*" (Wittgenstein, 1966, 27) and also: "One thinks of certain results of psychoanalysis as a discovery ... as apart from something persuaded by a psychoanalyst" (Wittgenstein, 1966, 27). A bit further he adds "What I do is also persuasion", because "very often I draw your attention on certain differences" (Wittgenstein, 1966, 28). Also he, as Freud, made use of myths, because "my symbolic description was really a mythological description" (Wittgenstein, 1953, 221).

It is in psychoanalysis, as new language, line of thinking, way of seeing the positive side of it, non in his presupposed scientific nature, that Wittgenstein finds common roots, because as far as human beings are concerned, he thought that one had to choose the correct myths, capable of giving "a *perspicuous* representation" of the "processes". "One of the principal origin of our incomprehension" he says "is the fact that we *do not see clearly* the use of our words. Our grammar lacks *perspicuity*. A perspicuous representation make comprehension possible, which means that we see *connections*" (Wittgenstein, 1953, 122).

So Freud's explanations of dreams is not valuable as a science that explains their causes, but rather as the correct language to speak about them. With this language Wittgenstein identified because "is all made up of excellent similes" but also "what I invent are *new similes*" (Monk, 1990, 357) which, as with those of Freud's bring someone to elaborate "a line of thinking" or to modify the existing

one, since: "much of what we do is to change our line of thinking, much of what I do is to change the line of thinking, much of what I do is to persuade others to change their line of thinking. Much of what we do is a matter of changing line of thinking" (Wittgenstein, 1966, 30).

We have assumed so far that Wittgenstein's way of philosophizing and psychoanalysis "required analogous talents" to persuade they both have to make use of the same instruments by which a conversation becomes persuasion as a narrative (a convincing explanation or a good story) and for its use of good or correct rethoric means. Wittgenstein says that his aim in philosophy was to "to give the morphology of the use of one expression. To show uses you had never dreamt before" (Monk, 1990, 496). This he does after having introduced the reader with the notion of language-game "the whole (of which) consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven" (Wittgenstein, 1953, 7). But he also says that a language-game is "part of a *frame* on whose basis our language operates" (Wittgenstein, 1953, 240). The concept of *frame* was extensively used by G. Bateson since 1954 or better, the action of *reframing* existing language games behaviours, or beliefs in the clients and their families lies at the heart of the systemic therapeutic method or of that of various brief therapies. But framing or reframing presupposes in the therapist linguistic-rethorical skills similar to those already mentioned. The concept of frame and that of language-game are similar, so we can presuppose that the persuasive or reframing activity, simply means as Wittgenstein notes abandoning old games to adopt new ones "But how can the new game made the old one seem obsolete? We now see something different and cannot continue to play ingenuously as before" (Wittgenstein, 1956, 132). To "see" means to "perceive", "But" says Bateson, "Perception operates only upon *difference*. All receipt of information is necessarily the receipt of news of difference" (Bateson, 1979, 29).

This "something different" is what Bateson calls *news of difference* "It takes at least two something to produce a difference. To produce news of difference, i.e. *information*, there must be two entities (real or imagined) such that the difference between them can be immanent in their mutual relationship" (Bateson, 1979, 68).

In classical therapeutic conversation there is always a structure which presupposes the notion of *power* and *control* beside a conditioning "value laden" which starts from the very definitions of the roles indicate by the terms "therapist" "patient", "client". But we have started by saying that the meaning by which to understand the term "therapy" was that of a *logos* for the *psychè*, how to take care of the *psychè* by means of words, or through a conversational praxis apt to produce changes, where the emphasis is on *language*, people and their problems are seen as problems in *language* whose aim is to let emerge those *news of difference* as the flow of conversation goes on or as the *language games* of people involved become clear. The language games which condition our behaviour as "a 'picture' that 'held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language" (Wittgenstein, 1953, 115).

But this 'image' can be the too much structured framed, vertical and asymmetrical of classical therapy, while in real conversations the flow is horizontal, polyphonic, unpredictable and unforeseen: a narrative which co-constructs itself in the dialogue, set thinking in movement, makes news of difference be perceived.

And this sometimes brings forth a change in the line of thinking, in the way of seeing, can teach "how to pass from a piece of disguise nonsense to something that is patent nonsense" (Wittgenstein, 1953, 464), can make changes through words.

All this, if it may be of any therapeutic value, still pertains to philosophical reflection and practice.

As, with Hillman "A successful therapy is in the end, a collaboration among narrations, a revision of the story in a more clever, more imaginative plot, which implies, however, the sense of the *mythos* in every part of it" (Hillman, 1983, 21).

Literature

- Arendt, H. 1987 *La vita della mente*, Bologna: Il Mulino.
 Barthes, R. 1972 *Mythologies*, New York: Hill and Wang.
 Bateson, G. 1972 *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, New York: Ballantine.
 Bateson, G. 1979 *Mind and Nature*, New York: E.P. Dutton.
 Birrel, A. 1993 *Chinese Mythology, An Introduction*, Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press.

- Bruner, J. 2002 *La fabbrica delle storie*, Roma-Bari: Laterza.
 Hillman, J. 1983 *Healing Fictions* it. transl. 1984 *Le storie che curano Freud, Jung, Adler*, Milano: R.Cortina.
 Hintikka, M.B. & Hintikka, J. 1986 *Investigating Wittgenstein*, Oxford-New York: Blackwell.
 Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. 1999 *Philosophy in the flesh. The embodied mind and its challenge to Western Thought*, New York: Basic Books.
 Lyotard, J-F. 1984 *The Postmodern Condition : a report on knowledge*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
 Marquard, O. (ed.) 1989 "Praxis, Philosophische", *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 7, Basel: Springer, pp. 1307-08.
 Monk, R. 1990 *Ludwig Wittgenstein. The duty of genius*, London: J. Cape.
 Peirce, C.S. in Ketner, K.L. (ed.) 1992 *Reasoning and the Logic of Things*, Harvard: Harvard University Press.
 Wittgenstein, L. 1953 *Philosophical investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell.
 Wittgenstein, L. 1956 *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, Oxford: Blackwell.
 Wittgenstein, L. 1966 *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, Oxford: Blackwell.
 Wittgenstein, L. 1977 *Vermischte Bemerkungen*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.